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In terms most familiar: technologies of whiteness in Australia and Canada: a comparative analysis

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
for the award of the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts
University of Wollongong

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TECHNOLOGIES OF WHITENESS IN AUSTRALIA AND CANADA
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Colin Salter
January 2009

AUTHORS' CERTIFICATION

I, Colin Salter, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Science, Technology and Society Program, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Colin Salter
Tuesday, January 27, 2009

abstract

This thesis explores the implications of colonial whiteness in the actions of communities supporting the struggles of First Peoples in Australia and Canada. Exploring how whiteness manifests itself, how it permeates as epistemic blank spots into the actions of those promoting respect and recognition, is used as a basis to reflect on social justice in contemporary society.

The emerging field of critical whiteness studies provides a solid foundation to engage with whiteness. Scholarship on the hegemony of technological discourse is drawn from to extend on this foundation. The notion of human history as a history of progress and the associated scientific hierarchisation of knowledges is rooted in relations of power|knowledge that perpetuate culturally inappropriate colonial relationships.¹ Gene Sharp's work on consent theories of power and Jacques Ellul's engagement with *Technological Society* are engaged with to explore how such hierarchisation of knowledges is maintained. The pervasiveness of this relation is explored in three case studies to reflect on the implications.

Engagement with white interpretations of the 1966 walk-out of Aboriginal

¹ Nikolas Rose, following Foucault and focussing on (self) governance and freedom, refers to the study of such changes as a genealogy (1999: 65-6).

stockworkers and their families at Wave Hill provides an historical grounding of contemporary whiteness. Interpretations of the walk-out as a strike that later shifted in focus, counter to oral historical accounts, are used as a basis to consider how manifestations of whiteness in Australia have shifted in the last 40 years. The 2001 formation of the Community Picket at Sandon Point, as a means to oppose a residential proposal, provides a focus for reflecting on whiteness in contemporary Australia. The Picket was established to offer support to the Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy (SPATE) and promote a progressive variant of 'practical reconciliation'. Friends of the Red Hill Valley's support for Haudenosaunee Treaty rights, in opposing an expressway proposal for the valley, is comparatively engaged with to reflect on contextual variations in how whiteness manifests itself in Australia and Canada. Exposing the actions of white supporters as counter-hegemonic and a challenge to aspects of whiteness whilst unintentionally maintaining unjust colonial relationships at the same time locates some of the challenges for both scholarship and action in the area of social justice.

acknowledgments

This thesis owes much to many. My first exposures, over a decade ago, to the injustices of colonial Australia and its ongoing contemporary manifestations are where the roots of this research can be located. The spaces created by activism and the praxis of listening fostered an uncomfortableness with what I had been educated about Australia, my *scared ignorance* (see Perera 2005) of its present and its past. Cognitive dissonance drove me to reflect on how my own complicity in perpetuating colonial assumptions was undermining my attempts to afford respect and recognition. My appreciation goes out to those who (continue to) expose my well-meaning intentions, as well as those who have helped me on my (ongoing) journey of transcending whiteness for my own sake. My broader awareness of the structural and epistemic violence embedded in contemporary western capitalism is similarly attributed to many. I hope these people and many others continue to assist in exposing my unmarked whiteness.

I am indebted to those continuing the struggle to protect the Sandon Point area. Their tireless efforts in the face of ongoing adversity continue to prove an inspiration. I must thank Jillian Smith for first introducing me to the dispute over the Red Hill Valley during the development of my research proposal. My experiences of listening to accounts of those struggling to protect the valley, affording respect and recognition to the Haudenosaunee, have exposed me to different contexts and approaches. Meeting participants in the land reclamation at Caledonia afforded an awareness of a culture I previously had very little exposure

to—and significant differences in the responses of white people to assertions of sovereignty. I would like to thank participants in the disputes who have provided many of the images reproduced in this thesis, alongside the National Gallery of Australia and Louis Seselja/the National Library of Australia for granting permission to use images from the respective collections.

Brian Martin and Susan Dodds have been instrumental as my supervisors at the University of Wollongong, alongside the unending support of many others within the Faculty of Arts. They have helped me through many issues, continued to help me re-focus, and provided invaluable direction. They have improved this thesis immensely. Rhonda Roberts and David Mercer assisted in early formation of my research proposal, without which, this journey may not have begun. The support of Walter Peace and the School of Geography of Earth Sciences at McMaster University cannot be overstated. Walt's willingness to assist during my time in Canada, openly sharing his extensive knowledge of the Red Hill Valley, made my comparative research possible. I am also indebted to Nathan Clark, Maia Iotzova, the residents of 'bunnytown', the many participants in the Red Hill Valley dispute I met, and the staff at the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster.

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contents

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	III
LIST OF FIGURES	IX
ABBREVIATIONS	XI
1. ONCE UPON AN ARSON	1
COMMONALITIES AND CONTEXT	5
STRUGGLING TOGETHER	12
THEORETICAL APPROACHES	14
RECONCILIATION, CONSTRUCTED DUALISMS, UNQUESTIONINGS	17
THESIS STRUCTURE	18
2. WHITENESS, CONSENT AND TECHNIQUE	21
WHAT IS THIS CONCEPT CALLED WHITENESS?	25
THE STUDY OF WHITENESS	42
THE HEGEMONIC NATURE OF WHITENESS	58
CONSENT, AND ITS WITHDRAWAL	61
TECHNIQUE AND TECHNOLOGICAL BLUFF	71
DRAWING THE THREADS	80
WHERE TO FROM HERE?	82
3. (MIS)INTERPRETATIONS OF THE WAVE HILL WALKOUT	83
GOOD INTENTIONS	88
WAVE HILL AND DAGURAGU	91
ABORIGINAL LABOUR AND THE PASTORAL INDUSTRY	92

NEWCASTLE WATERS	95
'ONE OF THE RECURRING FIGURES IN STORIES OF RESISTANCE'	97
THE WALKOUT AS INDETERMINATE	102
THE ONGOING ROLE OF WHITENESS	116
 4. 'PRACTICAL RECONCILIATION' AT SANDON POINT	 121
ANOTHER 'OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY'?	125
BROAD-BASED OPPOSITION... AND AN ALTERNATIVE	128
ABORIGINAL HISTORY AND THE DOUBLE BIND	137
STATUTORY CONTROLS AND LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS... ..	148
THE EMERGENCE OF WHITE AWARENESS.....	152
THE ROLE OF GOOD INTENTIONS	168
TEMPERED POSITIVES	173
 5. 'TOGETHER IN DIFFERENCE' IN THE RED HILL VALLEY	 177
WHERE IS THE COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN AT?	180
FIRST NATIONS AND THE RED HILL VALLEY	184
THE CONTEMPORARY RED HILL VALLEY	191
THE EVOLUTION OF THE DISPUTE.....	195
AN ISSUE LONG LEFT UNCONSIDERED?	204
RESPECT AND RECOGNITION BY CONTEXT.....	222
 6. TECHNOLOGIES OF WHITENESS—LEARNING FROM THEORY AND PRAXIS...	227
THEORISING WHITENESS IN A TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY	229
THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF PRAXIS	231
 APPENDIX 1	 235
APPENDIX 2	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY	243

list of figures

FIGURE 1. THE COLLAPSED EMBASSY ENGULFED IN FLAMES.....	3
FIGURE 2. CANBERRA'S ABORIGINAL TENT EMBASSY	6
FIGURE 3. VINCENT LINGIARI & GOUGH WHITLAM.....	7
FIGURE 4. LOCATION OF WAVE HILL	85
FIGURE 5. LOCATION OF SANDON POINT	122
FIGURE 6. THE SANDON POINT AREA.....	126
FIGURE 7. THE COMMUNITY PICKET	129
FIGURE 8. VALENTINE'S DAY BLOCKADE.....	158
FIGURE 9. NORTHERN LEADER CARTOON, 23 AUGUST 2006.....	165
FIGURE 10. LOCATION OF HAMILTON AND THE RED HILL VALLEY	179
FIGURE 12. AERIAL PHOTO OF THE RED HILL VALLEY	194
FIGURE 13. 'RALLY FOR THE VALLEY', 4 AUGUST 2003	209
FIGURE 14. THE AREA COVERED BY THE SANDON POINT COI (REFERRED TO AS 'ATTACHMENT A').....	237

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abbreviations

AASC	Australian Archaeological Survey Consultants
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ATE	Aboriginal Tent Embassy (Canberra)
CHOP	Clear Hamilton of Pollution
COI	Commissions of Inquiry (Sandon Point)
DIPNR	Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources
DEC	Department of Environment and Conservation
<i>Friends</i>	Friends of Red Hill Valley
HETF	Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force
HRCA	Hamilton Region Conservation Authority
IF1	Isolated Find 1 (artefact at Sandon Point)
ILALC	Illawarra local Aboriginal Land Council
Navin Officer	Navin Officer Heritage Consultants
NDP	New Democratic Party (Ontario)
The Picket	The Community Picket (Sandon Point)
SCLC	South Coast Labor Council
SPATE	Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy

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